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ABSTRACT

The paper examines several basic grading procedures, noting the advantages and disadvantages of each procedure for handicapped students. Eight alternatives to grading are mentioned; of these, four are considered: (1) contract grading, (2) pass-fail grading, (3) the mastery learning approach, and (4) written evaluations (including checklists). It is suggested that a more appropriate approach than any of these commonly found practices must be worked out on a building level. Samples of grading proposals are provided which may be useful to vocational teachers, including a pass-fail system based on competency achievement for a post-secondary program with suggested time parameters of 6, 9, and 12 months; a proposal combining grading with a weighting system; and a framework consisting of a set of assumptions and a single learner progress chart. (CL)

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GRADING HANDICAPPED STUDENTS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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GRADING HANDICAPPED STUDENTS

IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Grades! Everyone has had experience with grades either as the quivering receiver or the maybe even shakier giver. Grading is a topic that seldom gets an indifferent reply. It appears people are either "fer 'em or agin' 'em."

By taking an already sensitive issue, grading, and overlaying that with another sensitive issue, handicapped students in regular vocational programs, it almost sends the teachers' stress level up at the mention of grades for handicapped students.

There is a solution, but it's not simple. In this article you'll find an overview of several basic grading procedures and their advantages and disadvantages. Also included are a variety of suggested grading proposals designed to consider the unique needs of handicapped students.

Overview of Grading Procedures

There are basically eight alternatives to grading. They are written evaluations, including checklists; self-evaluations; assigning grades without disclosing those to the students; contract grading; mastery approach (traditional A-F or 1-5); pass/fail; credit/no credit; and blanket grading (Kirschenbaum, 1971). Vasa (1980) recommended four types of grading practices be used with handicapped students: contracts, pass/fail, mastery (letter or numerical grading), or checklists. There are advantages and disadvantages to each.

Contract grading, which involves a written agreement between a teacher and student, usually includes a specified amount of work due on a specified date for a specified grade. Both teacher and stu-

dent sign the agreement. Vasa (1980) suggests that the contract for mildly handicapped students be based on the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) with copies available to the special education teacher and parents. Advantages of contract grading are that students feel less anxiety about what is expected of a desired grade, students have a better idea of what is expected, and students are able to set and achieve personal learning goals. The disadvantages are the emphasis on quantity versus quality of work, qualitative differences in work are difficult to measure and grade (Kirschenbaum, et al, 1971).

Pass/fail grading is a system which allows the teacher to specify criteria and if students meet or surpass the criteria they pass, if not, they fail. Advantages of pass/fail are the reduced pressure and competition for grades, the freer learning atmosphere, reduced cheating and "brown-nosing", and reduced emphasis on grades, but still having to meet passing criteria. The disadvantages are a tendency for reduced evaluation and feedback to students, reduced opportunity to reward differences in student efforts or abilities, possible increased carelessness by students due to the freedom from pressure for grades, increased difficulty for teachers to establish and measure passing criteria, and continued lack of clarity about passing criteria for borderline students (Kirschenbaum, 1971).

The mastery learning approach is the ideal of the numerical (1-5) or letter (A-F) grading. Teachers share the course objectives and tell them exactly what is expected. Learning is highly individualized with the teacher acting as a resource person while students achieve the desired mastery level for a series of units of instruc-

tion. If letter or numerical grading is applied to mastery learning, the advantages are that the grades become an indication that certain objectives have been met, the grading reflects the meeting of pre-established criteria, the students have a specific direction to follow, the focus is on mastery of objectives, students pursue learning at their own pace, teachers must be well prepared, cooperative and willing to share.

The disadvantages are the time it requires to train teachers to use this system and the time it requires to plan effectively, teacher freedom may be restricted and it may be implemented without considering student freedom, and discouraging creative goal setting, and because of the time commitment, it is impossible to implement throughout a system without an extended period of time (Kirschenbaum, et al., 1971). Mastery learning is ideal but frequently is misused to become a discriminatory practice against lower functioning students requiring curriculum modifications to succeed.

The checklist is a form of written reporting which lists skills ranging from minimal competency to advanced mastery. It may be very useful in training to show the progression of skills the students demonstrate. A comment section on work behaviors and attitudes makes a checklist more effective than one only showing the acquisition of skills. The advantages of a checklist are that it is a meaningful tool to indicate skill attainment, it provides a list of skills students need to master, there is an immediate sense of satisfaction and motivation as skills are learned and checked off, and it is a realistic tool without some of the subjectivity of other grading approaches.

The disadvantages are the limited application of those situations which require specific skill mastery, effective checklists are time consuming to develop, they require more explanation than traditional grades, teachers working with handicapped students may find skills must be broken into smaller steps to provide a sense of accomplishment, and it may be difficult for teachers to establish beginning and advanced skill levels (Kirschenbaum, 1971).

Summary on Grading Procedures

These four grading approaches are probably the most commonly applied to classes with handicapped students enrolled. It is not uncommon for teachers to either fail or give a 0 to a student who is handicapped. Often teachers were unaware that a student was handicapped and had labeled his behavior as lazy or not trying. The other extreme is that a handicapped student is passed on without challenge because the teacher does not want to retain him or feels sorry for him.

Neither of these commonly found practices, failing or giving away grades for any quality work, is a satisfactory solution to grading the handicapped student. I have come to the conclusion after years of reading and talking to teachers about grading that this is an issue which can only be resolved by working out a solution which will work at the building level. Since 1974, I have been assigning students the task of developing a grading system in graduate courses. I started using this assignment before implementation of P.L. 94-142 as handicapped students were beginning to appear in larger numbers in regular and vocational programs. Few resources were available at that time, making the resolution of the problem one which

drew on local level creativity.

Recently there have been a variety of creative grading practices developed, but few of these deal with grading handicapped students. The teacher is back in the position of having a problem, but with a few ideas of grading students who are handicapped.

The following section includes a sample of grading proposals. Each of these was a student proposal developed to meet the following criteria: it must be fair to the handicapped student, it must be fair to the non-handicapped student in the same class, and it must meet with administrative approval. None of these approaches is the "right" answer to anyone's grading problem, but each represents an idea which may be useful to vocational teachers. I have retained the content of the original proposal with minor editing. My suggestions or comments follow each grading proposal.

Typing Proposals

Typing--Taylor-Johnson Proposal

The Taylor-Johnson proposal is based on the following factors regarding typing for employment: it is a pass-fail system based on competency achievement for a post-secondary program with suggested time parameters of 6, 9, and 12 months, and has no time limit for completion of the program. As indicated in the chart below, certification is awarded upon meeting 85 percent of the competencies. One-fourth credit is awarded for each competency completed.

Program	Total Competencies in Program	Required No. of Competencies to Receive Certificate (85%)	Total Credits Possible (Qtr. Cr.)*
12 Month	200	170	50
9 Month	150	128	38
6 Month	100	85	25

*Based on total number of competencies available

NOTE: Four competencies equal one quarter credit.

Competencies Completed	=	Credits Earned
1		¼
2		½
4		1
8		2
12		3
etc.		

This program provides students the time needed to complete the competencies for certification. The authors also suggest that specific consideration be given for students with physical limitations such as missing fingers or use of one hand.

Comments

It may help to identify the programs, Levels I, II, and III or Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced Typist. This would remove the stigma of completing the program in the expected 6, 9, or 12 months.

Taylor and Johnson call this system a pass-fail system, but actually it is a credit/no credit system. Students are awarded one-fourth credit for every competency met. The system is simple and easy to understand--two of the most critical factors in any grading system. While it is designed for typing, it might be applied to any program based on competencies.

Typing--Hincon, Barnes, Otey and Ruiio Proposal

This proposal is based on demonstrated self-improvement. First, students take a timed trial of two to five minutes to establish a base typing speed. This base typing speed is assigned the grade "D". Next, the teacher sets an error limit. Then, the teacher and student cooperatively set a goal of typing two to four words per minute faster. Then, a period of practice follows. Additional timed writings are given and if the student meets his new time twice, he earns a "C". A student earned a "B" if he exceeded the speed goal by one or two words per minute or an "A" for above two words. Students also can improve their grades by reducing errors. At the end of each grading period, a new speed goal is set.

This program has been successfully implemented for both non-handicapped and handicapped students in a Denver, Colorado, area high school.

Comments

This proposal has merit because it begins with teaching a skill and does not assume quick mastery. However, there is no precise description of how reducing errors improves the student's grade.

It also helps the teacher identify students who are either setting their goals too high or too low. The teacher can try to help them be a little more realistic. Again, this approach could be applied to other skills. The improvement of a skill or successfully accomplishing the next series of tasks becomes the basis of goal setting.

Technical Drawing--Flynn, Griffin, and St. Louis Proposal

This proposal (1980) is based on a one-semester course in technical drawing with three major units: basic drawing techniques (Unit I), mechanical drawing and dimensioning (Unit II) and exploring technical drawing careers (Unit III). The proposal considers the three domains: the cognitive (knowledge), psychomotor (skill), and affective (attitude).

In the cognitive area, three types of assessments are given:

- Unit quizzes are based on knowledge and performance. Eight quizzes are given at 10 points each.
- Unit exams also based on knowledge and performance. Three exams at 20 points each.
- Problem solving is tested by using problem sheets and case studies to assess knowledge and the application in given situations.
- Both quizzes and exams have performance questions in which students must demonstrate proficiency in drawing techniques.

In the psychomotor area, 18 plates are required in the course, with six in each unit.

Unit III has four required plates and two plates representing areas of student interest. Plates range from beginning, intermediate, to advanced difficulty levels. Students work in one of the levels which allows for both advancement within the level or to another level.

Plates are graded on the following criteria:

neatness	up to 2 points
task completion	up to 6 points
line quality	up to 3 points
lettering	up to 2 points
layout	up to 2 points
	maximum 15 points

In the affective domain, the following areas are evaluated:

attendance (up to 10 points)	point reductions are taken for poor attendance
cooperation (up to 10 points)	with fellow students, teacher, and classroom conduct
responsibility (up to 10 points)	care of tools, equipment, clean-up and completion of assigned tasks
time management (up to 10 points)	productive use of lab time and meeting due dates.
maximum 40 points	

This system represents a total of 450 points:

quizzes (80 points)	8 quizzes at 10 points
exams (60 points)	3 exams at 20 points
plates (270 points)	18 plates at 15 points
affective area (40 points)	10 each for attendance, cooperation, responsibility, and time management.
maximum 450 points	

A = 90%	405-450 points
B = 80%	360-404 points
C = 70%	315-359 points
D = 60%	270-314 points
F = 50% and below	below 269 points

An additional dimension of this grading system is that a contractual agreement for variable credit is encouraged for special

education students based on their personal goals for the course. Students are expected to meet with their instructor three times during the semester for planning, progress, and summative evaluation and future planning. Flynn, Griffin, and St. Louis (1980) suggest that special education students meet with the course instructor and special education teachers to develop the individual contract and course goals.

Comments

Home Economics--Qualteri, Compoz, Ellis, and Jackson Proposal

This grading proposal (1978) combines grading with a weighting system. In this proposal, the percentage of one item on the total grade might vary from one grading period to the next. The following chart is used in any of the six areas of home economics:

	Grade	% of Total Grade
1. Hands in all assignments.		
2. Completes assignments with accuracy.		
3. Shows proficiency of knowledge on tests.		
4. Completes all tests.		
5. Works on his/her best ability in class.		
6. Works well with other students in class.		
7. Is courteous to teacher and others.		
8. Good attendance in this class.		
Six or Nine Weeks Grade:		

The first step would be to decide the weighting of each of the areas for a given six-week period. Then a certain point assignment is made to each area based on a 100 point system. For example:

	Grade (points)	% of Total Grade
1. Hands in all assignments.		5% (5 points)
2. Completes assignments with accuracy.		10% (10 points)

Then the students' points (shown under grade) would be added and a total score assigned for that six- to nine-week period. Those points

would be converted to a grade. This system allows for teachers to vary emphasis during each grading period. Students would have access to that information and be aware of how their grade was determined.

Comments

This type of grading system has merit in that it allows teachers some flexibility in assessing student performance during each grading period. It can place greater emphasis on cognitive, psychomotor, or affective areas depending on the specific objectives being covered during that time. It is also easy to use. The points could easily be converted to a letter grade, a pass-fail, or a credit/no credit grading system.

It has a couple of areas which could also be potential problems. It does not reflect emphasis on skill attainment as it is shown, but that could be fairly easily adapted. The statement may need to be made more specific to clearly give students a solid indication of their performance in the class.

Home Economics--Carpenter and Henry Proposal

This proposal (1979) is extremely simple. It basically consists of a set of assumptions and a single learner progress chart. (See Figure V.)

FIGURE V
Learner Progress Chart

Title of Unit:

Tasks	Possible Points	Earned Points	Approval	Signature

Points Taken Away:

Comments:

First of all, the teacher is responsible for breaking down each activity into the tasks necessary for completion, with emphasis on assigning points to critical skills. This includes skills and behaviors reflecting positive work attributes. These tasks are listed in the left hand column, "Tasks". Next, the teacher and student decide how many points should be assigned to each. These are listed under "Possible Points". The teacher and student each retain a copy of the learner progress chart with each keeping a record of what points should be awarded for achievement. Students and the teacher then tally the top total points awarded as the 100 percent point, rather than using the total points possible.

Students and teachers then confer about the points awarded and attempt to reach consensus. The agreed upon number of points is then written into the column headed "Approval" and the student and teacher sign or initial the signature column.

Comments

In this system the teacher has the responsibility for breaking down the learning task into sequential steps. This assumes either that the teacher has this information available or that it can be fairly easily completed. This proposal considers student self-evaluation. The one unique factor is the top total points is the basis on which students are compared rather than an established number of points. For example, if only 86 points were earned of a possible 100, the basis for comparison would be on 86 rather than 100 points. Caution would need to be exercised that more advanced students would not lose an ideal standard to which they could compare themselves.

Another simple proposal which crosses all vocational areas allowed any special education student to seek partial credit for a vocational training program based on mastery of a series of objectives. If 25 percent of the objectives were met, 25 percent of the credit was awarded rather than the previous practice of failing the student (Zajac and Woolverton, 1978). Each proposal has merit, and collectively they present ideas teachers should consider in preparing their own grading techniques.

In these and other grading proposals I've reviewed, there are a number of common factors which seem to be critical. They are the need to task-analyze skills, develop a technique for identifying skill taught, and identify whether students have mastered the skills. There is also a focus on mastery of skills rather than earning grades. There seems to be a concern for identifying minimum standards, making it possible for handicapped students to earn a "C". There is allowance for greater time to achieve mastery of objectives and comple-

tion of projects. There is recognition of student input in the assessment process. In these proposals special education students have been placed in a position to monitor and assess their own skills. Teachers are concerned with addressing student performance in three areas: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective.

One teacher's reaction to grading said it best, "The task of grading has to be rated as an all time low in my teaching experience. Truly the most frustrating duty a professional educator has ever faced. More than once I have contemplated tossing all 130 names at a wall and those which reached the closest receiving A, next a B, and so forth!" (Allaire, 1981a). Hopefully, the suggestions included will provide guidance to both special and vocational educators in working out equitable grading systems for use with handicapped students. Neither special educators nor vocational educators can accomplish this task alone. Effective grading and evaluations need to be based on a cooperative working relationship between special education and vocational education teachers at the building level.

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